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290935Z Nov 02

2002HANOI02862 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ1118

PAGE 01 HANOI 02862 01 OF 02 291001Z
ACTION DRL-02

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DS-00	EAP-00	FBIE-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00
	NSAE-00	PER-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TEST-00	USIE-00
	IIP-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/003W	
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8214
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002862

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/IRF AND EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: DISCUSSING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WITH FM NIEN

REF: A. STATE 235694 (NOTAL) B. STATE 241039

- C. HANFORD/BURGHARDT E-MAIL D. HANOI 2694

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED CONCERN TO FM NIEN ABOUT RECENT REPORTS OVER ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS IN PARTICULAR, AND WARNED ABOUT A
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PAGE 02 HANOI 02862 01 OF 02 291001Z
POSSIBLE DESIGNATION OF VIETNAM AS A "COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN" UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT. FM NIEN CLAIMED SUCH REPORTS WERE "WRONG" BUT PROMISED TO TRY TO FIND OUT MORE. THE GVN PERSPECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE IS SO DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE USG THAT GVN OFFICIALS MAY LITERALLY NOT UNDERSTAND THE SOURCE OF USG CONCERN, AND MAY BE INCLINED TO INFER SINISTER MOTIVES. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) AMBASSADOR STRESSED TO FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DY NIEN IN A MEETING ON NOVEMBER 27 (SEPTELS) THE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CONDITIONS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM, AS DESCRIBED MOST RECENTLY BY AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM JOHN HANFORD AND OTHER USG OFFICIALS DURING THE NOVEMBER 8 HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON (REFS A AND B). HE NOTED THAT HE PLANNED TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE IN MORE DEPTH WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER LE VAN BANG AND GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE ON RELIGION LE QUANG VINH IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

[1](#)3. (U) AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTED RECENT REPORTS OF REPRESSION OF PROTESTANTS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. HE NOTED THAT MANY OFFICIALS IN DAK LAK AND GIA LAI PROVINCES IN PARTICULAR APPEARED TO ASSOCIATE ALL PROTESTANTS WITH THE DEGA SEPARATISTS, ALTHOUGH THE LATTER COMPOSE PERHAPS ONLY ONE PERCENT OF PROTESTANTS IN THIS AREA. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT AT LEAST SOME OFFICIALS TREATED ALL PROTESTANTS AS SUBVERSIVES AND TRIED TO CLAMP DOWN ON THEM. HE REITERATED THE IMPORTANCE WITH WHICH THE U.S. VIEWED THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND PLEDGED THAT WE WOULD CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION CAREFULLY, INCLUDING FREQUENT VISITS BY OUR CONSULATE GENERAL AND EMBASSY STAFFS. HE NOTED
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 HANOI 02862 01 OF 02 291001Z
AMBASSADOR HANFORD'S WARNING THAT, ABSENT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS SOON, VIETNAM WOULD LIKELY BE DESIGNATED A "COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN" UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT, WHICH COULD HAVE SERIOUS NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS ON US ASSISTANCE AND INVESTMENT.

[1](#)4. (U) FM NIEN CLAIMED THAT US CONCERNS APPEARED TO BE BASED ON "WRONG INFORMATION" BUT PROMISED TO "FIND OUT." HE ADMITTED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW EXACTLY HOW TO GO ABOUT "PROVING" THAT THE INFORMATION WAS WRONG, HOWEVER. HE DESCRIBED OVERALL CONDITIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLAND AS "MUCH IMPROVED," NOTING THAT HE HAD CONFIRMED THIS IMPRESSION WITH MANY RECENT VISITORS TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AS WELL AS WITH FELLOW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATES FROM THAT REGION. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SOME IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, HOWEVER, CONTINUED TO FOLLOW THE DEGA SEPARATISTS, AND THAT "MANY" IN VIETNAM DID "NOT UNDERSTAND

THE US POSITION" ON THE DEGAS.

15. (U) AMBASSADOR REITERATED WHAT HE HAD TOLD MINISTER FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES KSOR PHUOC (REF D): THE U.S. HAD NO INTEREST IN THE SEPARATION OF A DEGA STATE AND INSTEAD SUPPORTED -- AND RECOGNIZED -- A UNIFIED VIETNAM. HE STRESSED THAT THERE WAS "NO TRUTH" IN REPORTS OF ANY USG SUPPORT IN ANY WAY TO OVERTHROW THE GVN OR TO SET UP A SEPARATE STATE FOR THE DEGAS. HE NOTED THAT EAP DAS DALEY HAD ALSO MADE THIS POINT DIRECTLY TO DEGA LEADER KOK KSOR. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN, HOWEVER, OVER REPORTS THAT SOME HOUSE CHURCHES IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS HAD NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO JOIN THE SOUTHERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (SECV), DESPITE PENDING APPLICATIONS, AND THAT MANY CHURCHES, UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 HANOI 02862 01 OF 02 291001Z
PASTORS, AND BELIEVERS WERE SUBJECT TO UNDUE PRESSURES DUE TO THEIR "ILLEGAL" STATUS.

16. (U) FM NIEN POINTED TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF WORSHIP IN VIETNAM, BUT ADMITTED THAT CHURCHES LINKED WITH THE DEGA MOVEMENT WOULD INDEED NOT BE "ALLOWED." HE CLAIMED THAT ALL VIETNAMESE CITIZENS WERE FREE TO CHOOSE THEIR RELIGION AND SHOULD FACE "NO PROBLEM AT ALL." HE SAID THAT THOSE CHURCHES THAT WISHED FORMAL TIES WITH THE SECV SHOULD APPLY THROUGH LOCAL OFFICIALS AND GET APPROPRIATE PERMISSION.

17. (U) COMMENT: THE FOREIGN MINISTER SEEMED TO HAVE A POOR GRASP OF THE ISSUE. AT ONE POINT, HE DISCUSSED THE MATTER OF REGISTRATION OF A CHURCH AS IF IT WERE THE SAME AS OBTAINING A BUILDING PERMIT. MOST GVN OFFICIALS, UNLESS THEY WORK DIRECTLY ON RELIGION POLICY, PROBABLY NEVER THINK ABOUT THE SUBJECT. IN GENERAL, THE GVN AND CPV CONTINUE TO VIEW ALL FREEDOMS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEED FOR "NATIONAL SOLIDARITY" AND FOR STATE CONTROL (OR AT LEAST SUPERVISION) OVER ALL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY. THEY CANNOT COMPREHEND WHY "HOUSE CHURCHES" OUTSIDE OF THE OFFICIAL

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ1119

PAGE 01 HANOI 02862 02 OF 02 291001Z
ACTION DRL-02

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UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 HANOI 002862

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FRAMEWORK SHOULD EXIST OR WHY THE USG SHOULD CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY SEE AS CLEARLY "ILLEGAL" AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANTI-STATE ORGANIZATIONS. CONVINCED, AS ALWAYS, THAT THE PARTY AND STATE "KNOW BEST," THEY LIKELY CANNOT GENUINELY FATHOM THE TRUE NATURE OF US AND INTERNATIONAL CONCERN OVER THE HIGHLANDS AND ELSEWHERE. FURTHERMORE, MANY OFFICIALS BOTH UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 HANOI 02862 02 OF 02 291001Z
AT THE CENTRAL AND LOCAL LEVELS ARE PROBABLY INCLINED TO INFER SINISTER MOTIVES FOR SUCH EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN. BURGHARDT

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